

leaf of paper showing early Tibetan writing on both sides. He had discovered it some time before by scraping among the ruins of the old fort of Miran, which the Russian map showed as situated near one of the routes leading from Charklik to Abdal. The 'find' looked decidedly promising, and in conjunction with the fairly detailed description Tokhta Akhun could give me of what manifestly were remains of old shrines in the vicinity of the ruined fort, it induced me so to shape my programme that I might visit Miran *en route* for the sake of trial excavations.

But even at Charklik itself, engrossed as I was day and night by practical preparations, I could not keep my thoughts altogether from antiquarian interests close a hand. A number of considerations convinced me that the oasis of Charklik represented the chief place of this whole Lop-nor region in old times as it does now. The river to which it owed its existence was certainly the largest descending to the Lop-nor depression from the Kun-lun east of Charchan. The facilities it offers for irrigation on its alluvial fan are far more assured than any which could possibly be derived in this region from the terminal course of the Tarim itself sluggishly winding in low and ever-shifting beds. Broad geographical facts left no doubt for any one acquainted with local conditions that Marco Polo's Lop, "a large town at the edge of the Desert" where "travellers repose before entering on the Desert" *en route* for Sha-chou and China proper, must have occupied the position of the present Charklik.

Nor could I see any reason for placing elsewhere the capital of that "ancient kingdom of Na-fo-po, the same as the territory of Lou-lan," which Hsüan-tsang reached after ten marches to the north-east of Chü-mo or Charchan, and which was the pilgrim's last stage before his return to Chinese soil. It would be impossible to discuss here in detail all the historical evidence, furnished by the Chinese Annals and pilgrims' accounts, which proves that the alternate name Lou-lan or Shan-shan was from Han times down to the T'ang dynasty applied to the whole of the region comprising Lop-nor and the adjacent tracts of desert and riverine jungle, along with what scattered small oases